

theless lie had observed the rise of the
Symbolist, Occultist,
and Decadent schools, — a wave of returning
mysticism, as
it were, which, as he had remarked in an
address to the
Paris students, was invading art as well as
literature. No
little balderdash, was being written about the
alleged bank-
ruptcy of science, Eome was coquetting with the
Kepublic,
there was much talk of a new Catholicism
adapted to the
modern world, the clergy were showing extreme
activity, and
a good many *universitaires* and *iiormaliens*,
among whom
the Voltairean spirit had formerly
predominated, seemed
won over to the Church's side and anxious to
co-operate
with it in securing the return of France to the
fold, as if,
indeed, agnosticism had been carried too far
and must now
be checked. The Louxdes and similar
pilgrimages repre-
sented a notable phase of the agitation, and
Zola, who had
attended them two years running as a
spectator, found in
them some illustration of the first of the
Christian virtues,
Faith. It thereupon occurred to him that
Eome would
illustrate Hope, for it was in her and in her
pontiff, Leo
XIII, that all who desired to see the world
reconquered by
a rejuvenated Catholicism set their hopes.
Finally Paris
would afford abundant illustration of Charity in
its various
senses. Now the question, whether religion
might flourish
anew in France depended, at least largely, on
the practice

of the aforesaid virtues and the light in which
they were
regarded by the community at large. Was the
faith of
 Lourdes justified, was any real hope to be
found in Eome,
was the charity of Paris adequate or not? Zola
returned a
negative answer, to all those questions; and
at an early
stage of the writing of " Les Trois Villes " he
resolved to sup-
plement this series by a further one which
would enunciate